



Student Conservation Association Philadelphia Community Conservation Crew Program 2010 Summer Program Report

SCA completed a successful second year of the Philadelphia Community Conservation Crew Program in August. The program engaged 51 young men and women from Philadelphia in activities which provided valuable life skills, and green job training as they completed over 9,000 hours of conservation service.

Overview

- 5 Conservation Crews comprised of 10 local high school students, ages 15-19.
- 26 females and 25 males participated
- 44 participants identified themselves as African American, and 7 as Asian, Latino, or multiracial
- 11 adult crew leaders, 2 per crew, with one 'floating' leader/coordinator
- Six weeks of field and program activities from June to August
- 4 days of conservation service project work
- 1 day each week dedicated to environmental education related to their project or green jobs training.

Student Orientation and Training

At the start of the program, crew members participated in a weeklong training that focused on:

- An introduction to SCA programs, logistics, expectations, and teambuilding.
- SCA's Green Job Readiness Curriculum which providing training and job skills to members, most of whom were starting their first work experience. Topics covered included financial literacy, resume writing, interviewing, dress code, acceptable behavior and language, conflict resolution, and communication. A Financial Literacy component was hosted by PNC bank. The presentation covered topics such as life skills, budgeting, banking services, credit, and interest and understanding pay checks and taxes.
- Environmental education, tool use and safety discussions provided members with hands on technical skills and safety training. A workshop – *Weed Warriors*® - was led by John Heinz staff and provided an introduction to invasive plant species identification and removal.



Project Sites and Accomplishments

Each partnering park provided staff that supported the crews by providing materials, tools and education. The on the ground support from park staff was greatly appreciated, the staff assisted in the daily operations of the projects but also shared knowledge of both the ecology and history of the site, helping to enrich the crew's experience and understanding of Philadelphia's rich history. Participants spent five weeks working in their respective park. Weekly education days heightened the participant's awareness of environmental issues, green jobs training, and introduced them to related initiatives around the city. SCA's educational curriculum was based on cultivating, broadening and enhancing the participants' knowledge of environmental science and conservation stewardship using the outdoors as a teaching environment.

Philadelphia crew members contributed 9,792 hours of restoration work on Philadelphia's parks, refuges, and natural areas. Measurable results include:

- 13,000 feet of trail restored and maintained
- 5,000 feet of new trail built
- 30 water bars constructed
- 43 check steps built
- 60 feet of bridges restored
- 2,000 feet of fencing replaced
- 6 feet of retaining walls constructed
- 8,000 feet of invasive species removed
- 200 bags of trash collected

Valley Forge National Historical Park

Valley Forge welcomed a crew for the second year. The crew spent time cleaning out barns at Knox's headquarters, collecting over 23 bags of trash and debris during their first week of work. They removed invasive weeds at the Knox's home, and put on waders to remove invasive crayfish from park streams. Most members agreed that this was their favorite project.

John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge

The Refuge is also a second year-host and the location of SCA's local program office. Projects for the crews focused on the Henderson trail and a variety of projects including cutting back park road corridors with loppers, restoring the tread to safe and usable condition, beating back biomass and vegetation, weeded areas near the fishing pier, installed four steps on a steep slope, removed invasives, and laid mulch to provide a firmer tread. They built six benches, creating a usable public space and mulched the park's outdoor classroom.

Friends of the Wissahickon (FOW)

This was SCA's second summer working with FOW. The SCA crew worked two days a week clearing and removing trash and graffiti from the Devil's Pool picnic area. These clean-ups resulted in more than 16 bags of trash each week. All trash that was collected was recycled if possible. They painted over graffiti throughout the park and completed daily trail assessments with members walking the trail and using their "trail-eyes" to identify and flag trail maintenance issues.

Schuylkill Environmental Education Center

The participants had a great experience working on the trails—exploring and utilizing the wide variety of interactive educational exhibits at the center. They cleared a 1903 house which will be a future education center, of trash and prepared the building for painting. They built stone steps, a retaining wall, wooden water bars, and lopped weeds invading the trails.

Fairmount Park

Wood Bridge Run was one of the 63 regional and neighborhood parks the crew worked on this summer. This specific area was used often by the neighborhood but not maintained very well, with undefined trails, trash/debris build up and overgrown invasive plant areas. The crew turned the poorly maintained space into a useable well defined trail in the park.






Evaluation

Crews were asked to provide feedback on the program's components. Members provided feedback on their crew leaders, work projects, SCA support and Environmental Education days. Agencies responded to questions on the crew leaders, quality and scope of work, crew member management and SCA support during a debrief meeting at the close of the program. The agencies felt the amount and quality of work that crews completed exceeded all their expectations.

Participants were from low income families and attend the following high schools:

- Archbishop Prendergast HS
- Aya Educational Institute
- Benjamin Franklin HS
- John Bartram HS
- Bodine HS
- Central HS
- Charter High School for Architecture & Design
- Communications Technology HS
- Connections Academy
- Creative and Performing Arts
- Edison HS
- De La Salle in Towne
- Samuel Fels HS
- Franklin Learning Center
- Freire Charter School
- HS for Business and Technology
- High School of the Future
- J. R. Masterman
- Martin Luther King HS
- Mathematics, Civics and Sciences Charter School
- Mercy Vocational HS
- Overbrook HS
- New Media Technology Charter School
- NorthEast HS
- Pennsylvania Leadership Cyber Charter School
- Philadelphia High School for Girls
- Philadelphia Learning Academy
- Philadelphia Military Academy
- Prep Charter High School
- W.B. Saul HS
- Sayre HS
- The Shipley School
- Truebright Science Academy Charter School
- Simoz Gratz HS
- University of the Sciences in Philadelphia

The Philadelphia crew members learned about conservation, gained new skills while improving local resources, and felt the work they accomplished benefited the community. The following comments from some of the participants provide testimony to their satisfaction.

-  *Thank you for giving me the chance to learn about new things and going to nice places that I've never been before in my own home town. I really enjoyed working outdoors for the first time. I learned about trail work and it was a lot of fun.* – Shekeria Byrd, Valley Forge Crew Member
-  *This summer's experience has been fun and somewhat life changing. I have met new people and learned new things about life that I will take into consideration for a lifetime. I realized that my love for the outdoors and nature has grown tremendously during this short period of time and I enjoyed every minute of it.* – Maryanne Manuel, Valley Forge Crew
-  *Cray-fishing and removing invasive species were my favorite projects. But my entire experience this summer has broadened my horizon and I will never forget it.* – Resheen Wilson, Valley Forge Crew Member
-  *Thanks to this summer experience I have a have gained a better understanding of the environment and why we need to protect it because it matters. I also learned how to become a better person altogether because of my crew and working with them.* – Quinton Long, Friends of the Wissahickon Crew Member
-  *This wasn't just any summer job – I've learned a lot over my 6 week experience about, trail work, invasive species, tools and a lot more. As a crew we worked magnificently together to meet each project goal and as people always say "teamwork makes the dream work", I will never forget my SCA experience.* – Christina Williams, Wissahickon Crew Member